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- Number in Sinkiang:** The Kirghiz race of Sinkiang is also referred to, both in Sinkiang and in English-language texts on that province, as Heiheitze. According to a 1941 survey they numbered 65,248 or slightly less than 1.75 per cent of the total population of Sinkiang.
- Origin of the Name:** The name Kirghiz was arrived at by combining the two words kir and kiz, which mean "Forty Maidens." Kirghiz legends claim that there were once "Forty Maidens" who became pregnant and so gave birth to their race. There are three different versions as to how these "Forty Maidens" became pregnant. The first, and most popular, is that the male parent of the Kirghiz race was a red dog, another version claims that the foam of Issyk Kul (Warm Lake), located in what is presently the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic, was the cause of their pregnancy. The third version claims that they became pregnant by dipping their fingers in a magic stream.
- History of the Race:** The original home of the Kirghiz, a nomadic, Alpine people, was on the upper Yenisei River, located in what is now Tannu Tuva. One of the Sinkiang tribal, or clan, names, Burut, appears to confirm their northern origin and an ancient connection with the ancestors of the Burvat Mongols. In 840 Kirghiz war bands defeated the Uighurs in Mongolia, forcing some of the Uighurs to move south into Sinkiang. In the tenth century the Kirghiz themselves were defeated by the Khara Khitai. A part of the Kirghiz then moved back to the Yenisei River and the rest started on a gradual migration southwest toward the Tien Shan range. Some of the Kirghiz were driven west by the inhabitants of Sinkiang. Ch'ien-Lung of the Manchu Dynasty stopped this by confirming the right of the Kirghiz to the lands they had occupied and placed them under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Kashgar. Like the Kazakhs, the Kirghiz were conquered by the Russians in 1860 to 1870, except for those who remained within Chinese territory.

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The Kirghiz objected to the payment of taxes to the Governor of Kashgar and, when these were forcibly exacted, they rebelled under the leadership of two chieftains, Changar and Yusu. They were never completely subdued and after years of trouble took advantage of the Yakub Beg rebellion of 1862 to 1874 to throw off the sovereignty of Emperor Tung-Chi and proclaim themselves subjects of Russia. A good many of them still remained on Chinese territory, however, and in the long wrangles which took place concerning the demarcation of the frontier, the exact status of the Kirghiz remained vague. They were often claimed by both Russia and China, while they successfully avoided the domination of either power. Up to the time of the Soviet Revolution, the historical development of the Kirghiz on both sides of the frontier was essentially the same. The Soviets were able to settle and organize most of the Kirghiz in their territory into collectives, while the Sinkiang Kirghiz have continued in their traditional nomadic ways.

4. Language: Kirghiz is a Turkic language, closely resembling that of the Kazakhs. The same language is spoken by Kirghiz on the Soviet side of the frontier. The Kirghiz in Sinkiang are almost completely illiterate and the only written form for the language is the Arabic script. In the USSR, on the other hand, illiteracy has decreased sharply with the introduction of the new Kirghiz alphabet which was an adapted Cyrillic script.
5. Religion: The Kirghiz belong to the Sunni order of the Islamic faith. Although they consider themselves exemplary Moslems and are less tolerant of non-Moslems than the Kazakhs, they still have many strong shamanistic holdovers. For example, one of the duties of the "Mora," their priests, is to cast out sickness by ordering that a sheep be killed and placed before the afflicted man. Then there is dancing and the beating of drums, by which means they believe they can drive out the devils from the man and cause them to enter the carcass of the sheep. When this is taken away it is thought that the devils go with it. So complete is their faith in this method of cure that the sick man will more often than not be revived.
6. Physical Characteristics: The features of the Kirghiz are of Mongoloid type, relatively short with straight hair, black eyes with the epicanthic fold, nose broad at the base, light brown skin and slight facial and body hair. They are a powerful and raw-boned race with an unusually keen sense of sight.
7. Dress: The Kirghiz men wear long gowns which are stuffed with wool and cotton and are worn over trousers that are tucked into high riding boots. Most Kirghiz do not wear the same hats winter and summer. Their winter hats are made of black fur and have ear flaps, while in the summer they generally wear a highly embroidered tebitaika (skull-cap). There is a hat which is worn by the Kirghiz men in both winter and summer. It is a round, white, felt hat, similar in shape to a US sailor cap. The brim, however, is of black felt and left up in back and turned down in front to shield the eyes. The favorite colors of the Kirghiz are black and maroon and are reflected in all of their clothing. The Kirghiz women wear the same clothing as the men with the exception of their unique and graceful head-dress. This consists of a tastefully wound white turban which sits precariously high on the head and one end of which, one foot in length, swings on the back. Kirghiz women veil their faces with white cloth, or lace of their own weaving, and are particularly handsome, having a splendid carriage.
8. Concentrations: The Kirghiz are Alpine nomads who are split up into small tribes and distributed throughout the Tekes Valley and in the extreme heights of the Tien Shan range as far east as Kashgar, their urban concentration in Sinkiang.
9. Dwellings: The Kirghiz, like the Kazakhs, generally live in yurts all the year round, but some reside in mud or log cabins during the winter.
10. Eating Habits: The diet of the nomadic Kirghiz tribesmen consists of approximately 50 per cent milk, 40 per cent meat, and 10 per cent cereal. They eat absolutely no vegetables and are considered medium eaters. The rich among them subsist on mutton, rice and mare's milk. The poorer families have to live on noodle soup and mare's milk, and occasional small amounts of mutton. A guest at one of their encampments is always offered sour milk. The Kirghiz consume no pork, and wine is never drunk, even at feasts. Little heed is paid to the details of the Moslem eating code save in these two respects.

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11. Occupations: Like the Kazakhs, the Kirghiz are pastoral nomads. They are, however, Alpine nomads who are extremely fine horsemen and dwell amongst the steep crags and high narrow mountain trails in contrast to the Kazakhs who are steppe nomads. While some groups of Kazakhs spend their winters in the protection of the foothills below the main mountain ranges and while their winter quarters are owned by individual families, the Kirghiz establish their winter quarters on the banks of rivers and the whole clan occupies common winter quarters. Their summer pastures, unlike those of the Kazakhs, are high up in the mountains. Each clan moves freely up and down between winter quarters and high summer pastures, but is limited in horizontal movement by the presence of other clans in neighboring valleys.

Basically they are given to the tending of extensive sheep flocks, breeding Bactrian camels and horned cattle, including yaks which are useful pack animals for mountain travel. The Kirghiz also occupy themselves with hunting furred animals, the wealthier ones using eagles for that purpose. They are herdsmen and hunters, all other duties being left to their women. They are considerably poorer in total number of livestock than the Kazakhs, but have somewhat more agriculture, some of it irrigated. However, since they are nomadic by nature, those who have been forced to turn to agriculture are raising crops only half-heartedly and since the lands which they inhabit are not very fertile they are extremely poor. During a large part of the year they depend for their water upon snow from the hills. Because of their impoverishment it is not surprising that they show a great ingenuity in avoiding taxation.

12. Customs:

- a. General: The Kirghiz vest their tribal government in the hands of the elder whose dictates are strictly respected. No foreigner may witness a Kirghiz court. The adjournment of the court is signaled with loud sounding thumps on the table and a fierce, solemnly sworn oath.

On horseback they are superb. From an early age the youngsters live in the saddle. A game called "baiga," a furious race, is their favorite sport. At the sounding of a bugle each man leaps upon the best horse he can find to dash wildly, sometimes for many miles, to seize the newly killed lamb which has been placed at the finish of the race as a prize. These races, in which the children often take part, must be seen to be believed. Sometimes the course is no less than twenty miles, every mile being completed with utter bedlam, tricks fair and foul and with wild excitement and screaming.

- b. Marriage: Their marriage customs are very similar to those of the Uighurs, but the bride on entering her new home must share, with her husband, a wheat-cake soaked in salt water. This ritual is said to ensure fertility and to make it more likely that the children will be males. A man may take four wives, but all the wives enjoy equal rights and are of the same social standing. It is very unusual for a woman to marry a second time.
- c. Divorce: Domestic quarrels are always dealt with by the Mora, the local priest. The Mora enters the tent and reads the Koran to the disputing couple. The same rule applies to widows as among the Kazakhs, they must not remarry out of the husband's family. This principle is firmly established despite the fact that it is frowned upon by all strict followers of Islam.
- d. Burial Rites: Hilarity and celebration, not sadness, characterizes the funeral ceremony. The dead person is placed on a hilltop, interned with food, clothing and a certain amount of money, in a high, walled tomb. The sustenance is supposed to feed him on the way to the hereafter. They pay great respect to their dead and the annual ceremony of visiting the graves is an occasion for much feasting. Friends and relatives bring gifts and in return are feasted. The whole ritual ends with either horse races or shooting competitions.
13. Good Qualities: The Kirghiz are frank and manly and, save during their outbursts of lawlessness, they are quite law-abiding. Their fear of officials is almost laughable at times. Despite their poverty they are very hospitable and, though they are always eager for plunder, they consider it the depth of shame to steal from a guest.

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14. Bad Qualities: From the sanguinary and unsavory episodes in the Kirghiz history one can judge the general characteristics of this people. They are born plunderers, good fighters, bad neighbors and a thorn in the side of authorities wherever they are to be found.
15. Summary: There can be no denying the fact that the Kirghiz still present an awkward problem to the Government of Sinkiang. Perhaps the best solution would be to allow them as much freedom as possible so as to gradually win their confidence and overcome their distrust of all official rule. But their thieving inclinations make it quite impossible to ignore them and since they have the knack of moving swiftly from place to place amid the foothills of the Tien Shan range, expeditions to punish them for their occasional raids upon Moslen villages meet with great difficulties and do not usually achieve their objective. One good thing the Kirghiz have done; during the brief period when, under the leadership of Usman they controlled Kashgar, they convinced the other Moslens that the Chinese administration, with all its faults, was paradise compared with their regime. Even at the present time they still sit on the fence and though Soviet influence over them is increasing, they are now tending to drift towards China. Probably their movements are just an instinctive avoidance of any irksome authority.

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